DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 830 HE 018 875

AUTHOR Smith, Glenn D.
TITLE Changing Role Relationships as a University Moves toward Decentralized Administration.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southern Speech Communication Association (Winston-Salem, NC, April 11-14, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Change; Administrators; *College Administration; College Faculty; Committees; Deans; *Decentralization; Department Heads; Faculty Workload; Higher Education; Organizational Change; *Participative Decision Making; Policy Formation; Power Structure; *Role Perception; *Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Resistance to Change

ABSTRACT

The changing role relationships that occurred between the faculty and administrators of a university that implemented a decentralized management process over a 5-year period are discussed. The university changed from being highly centralized toward a shared and layered administrative approach. Five changes were instituted: an extensive committee system; upgrading of the authority of the Vice President for Academic Affairs; greater administrataive authority for college deans; greater latitude for department heads in administrative decisions of the department; and individual faculty members' opportunities for greater involvement in policy development. Faculty resistance to change occurred as committee loads increased and responsibility for policy change was more evenly shared among the administrative layers of university governance. Involvement in committees made a difference in the relationships of faculty with department heads, the dean, and the vice-president. Just as many faculty became disenchanted with the responsibility of administrative decision making, department heads became confused about what management skills were needed to function in the decentralized administrative environment. A series of managerial seminars was also adopted. (SW)

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Changing Role Relationships as a University Moves Toward Decentralized Administration

Prepared for the Southern Speech Communication Association Annual Convention, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, April 11-14, 1985

by Glenn D. Smith, Professor of Speech and Theatre
University of Central Arkansas
Box 1721
Conway, AR 72032

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The changing conditions that are the effects of changes in administrative style of a university from being highly centralized toward a shared and layered administrative approach is the subject of this paper. The author's observations as a participant in the process over several years of change toward decentralization of decision making is the focus. Of particular interest to the reader is the resistance to change manifested by faculty as the committee loads increased and responsibility for policy change was more evenly shared among the administrative layers of university governance.

Changing Role Relationships as a University Moves Toward Decentralized Administration

The relationship between the department chair and the faculty will often reflect the top level administrative style and organization of the university. That is to say, that an authoritian style with a centralized organization will result in communication flow downward, but little upward communication will be generated. As students of communication, we know what happens in interpersonal relations when communication flows only one way. This is pretty much what the situation was between the faculty and chairs at my institution prior to the efforts to decentralize administration. This paper will attempt to delineate the changing role relationships between the faculty and the chair as the process of decentralization unfolded over a period of five years.

The heritage of my institution is rooted in the normal school foundation It was a teacher training college until the mid-sixties when it began to change toward a multifaceted small university. As was the tradition in most teacher preparatory schools, the administrative style closely resembled the typical public school districts throughout the country--a strong central administrative organization. With the changes in purpose and programs in the university, came the need for change in administrative style. A new president was appointed in 1975, and his appointment resulted in five changes that directly affected the role relationships of the chairman and the faculty. First, a rather extensive committee system was developed. Second, the role of the Vice President for Academic Affairs was upgraded in terms of authority. Third, the college deans' roles were given greater administrative authority. Fourth, the departmental chairman was given

greater latitude in administrative decisions of the department. Five, the individual faculty member was offered greater opportunity for involvement in the policy development of the institution through participation in the committees of the University.

Academics are familiar with the committee system of governance having used the structure since beginning of university life in the middle ages. Although committee governance has been a part of the university tradition for that length of time, it has not been used extensively in the teacher training institution until recently with the evolvement toward university status by those institutions. Typically, the committee organization permeates the university system from department to division or college to the university wide levels. The committee serves one of two purposes which are to recommend policy or to set policy. Usually, the function of the committee is determined by the level of authority invested. For example a committee operating within a department might have the responsibility of setting the policy for text requisitions, because the department has the authority to determine the texts to be used in courses offered by the department. On the other hand, the departmental committee on budget has only the power to recommend the budget for the coming year, because the authority for determining the amount of funds to be allocated to a department is invested in the office of the dean or perhaps the vice-president for academic affairs.

Prior to the decentralization of authority at my institution, committees were in existence in small numbers, but they were primarily serving as recommending bodies even in areas normally thought of as organizationally autonomous in the typical university structure. Such decisions as the

allocation of telephones in faculty offices were not made at the department level even though funds might be available in the department budget. When a request to place a telephone in a new faculty member's office came up, the chair placed an order for the phone, and it was delivered and installed. A day or two later the chair was called to the office of the president and was informed that the telephone in the new faculty's office would be removed immediately, because there were older faculty in near by departments who were without phone service, and it would be unthinkable to allow a new instructor to have a telephone even though the department budget could afford it. With the decentralization of administrative authority, heady days of faculty decision making within the departments of the university followed with morale boosted to unprecedented heights.

The vice-president for academic affairs held authority under the old system, but the authority was a second in command taking orders directly from the president with little autonomy in academic matters. With decentralization, four vice-presidents were created in the areas of academic affairs, business affairs, student affairs, and physical plant or maintenance. Each vice-president is concerned with his particular elements of the system, and each is equal to the other three when in deliberations of the president's council. If the issue being discussed is primarily an academic issue such as classroom space to alleviate crowding, the vice-president for academic affairs leads the discussion with the concerns of the other three vice-presidents voiced where it is appropriate. One of the major authority changes that came with decentralization, was the control of the budget each vice-president was given. The vice-president for academic affairs argues his case before the budget advisory committee as do his peers, and once

the budget is set, he has full control over those monies allocated to academic affairs.

Prior to decentralization of administrative authority, the position of dean was nonexistent. With decentralization, the four colleges of business, education, fine and applied arts, and sciences and humanities were created and a dean was appointed to head each college. At first the dean's position was much like the vice-president's relationship with the president, one of rubber stamping administrative decisions handed down. Under the new administration, the dean was given greater responsibility for the budgets, faculty, and physical needs of the college. The dean's control of the budget for his college was the major change in the move to decentralize administrative decision making.

Along with greater autonomy for the dean came greater freedom of decision making for the chair in each department. The old regime viewed the chair's role as the foreman over the workers or, perhaps more kindly, the principal over the teachers. With this role, little decision making was possible that did not have to be cleared in the "head shed" as illustrated in the telephone incident above. Decentralization brought greater responsibility and authority over departmental budgets, faculty hiring, promotion, tenure, curricular matters, and physical equipment needs. With the changes in departmental chair role, the changes in the chair and faculty relationship came as a direct result. Whereas prior to decentralization there was great feeling of impotence and frustration among the chairman in matters of administrative responsibility, so it was for the faculty who felt disenfranchised from any involvement in the administrative life of the institution. The chairman of the department and his faculty shared

in the misery of being peons when both knew that the department level should be the major academic action center, but for that action to be possible greater administrative autonomy was needed.

The involvement of faculty in the numerous committees that come with administrative decentralization was the turning point in changing the relationship between the chairman and the faculty. It was also this change that made a difference in the relationships of faculty and the dean and the faculty and the vice-president. The development of two way communication was the key to giving greater vitality to the academic enterprise on my campus. The major change in the faculty and chair relations was the euphoria that resulted from the activation of policy setting committees within the department. The chair no longer had the sole responsibility of acting upon promotion or tenure or appointments or budgets. Departments were given the authority to promote or tenure its faculty in conjunction with college and university policies. The departments were given the responsibility for filling vacancies that occurred in the faculty. These decisions, along with more common place decisions of budgets, text acquisitions, and curriculum revisions, gave the department the role of an antonomous organization responsible for its own welfare.

Once the period of euphoria passed, the reality of decision making came fully upon the participants. The realization that with policy decision privileges came the concurrent responsibility of giving time and energy to committee service. For many of the older faculty who had been used to the limited access to administrative policy making, it became too high a price to pay in giving up their time for teaching preparation, research interests, fishing and golf. It is common on the campus today to hear

complaints about the demand on faculty time to serve on the myriad committees that now exist. Along with the complaining, a certain amount of resistance has arisen over the faculty being involved in administrative "details" and not being compensated as well as administrators are sometimes compensated. Having said this, it is also to be noted that the greater feeling of partnership in the academic arena between the faculty and chair has not diminished from the point it reached with the changes in administrative decentralization. In terms of departmental matters, the faculty prefers the sharing of creative and dynamic involvement to that of the morass of significant problem identification accompanied by circular solution testing or implementation.

Having satisfaction with the job only at the departmental level was not enough if an institution was to be decentralized in administrative style. A fulfillment of the individual's need to be a part of the life of the university at all levels was a driving force for the adoption of the Higher Education Management Institute (HEMI) program. Just as many faculty became disenchanted with the responsibility of administrative decision making, chairman became confused about what management skills were needed to function in the decentralized administrative environment. In short, the many changes brought a confusion of roles that led to resistance and a yearning by some to return to the old style of governance. HEMI was inaugurated as a management development program for chairs, deans, vice-presidents, and the president in the fall of 1984. The HEMI program is a series of managerial seminars dealing with topics such as leading, motivating, marketing, managing change, organizational communication, and defining goals and objectives.

The purpose in offering the HEMI is to develop a managerial style that will accommodate two way communication. Several of the seminars have been presented. The results are not complete for measurement of the success in those seminars, because the measurement will be made in terms of observable improvement in the vertical information flow of the institution. As a facilitator, seminar leaders are not teaching according to HEMI, I have conducted one seminar in communication, and I am scheduled for another during the summer. I feel the program has merit, and HEMI is a part of the equation for improving management in a decentralized administrative setting. The other part of that equation is to give the faculty time to live and develop with the system as partners in the academic and administrative undertaking.